

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY LORD
REDESDALE, K.C.V.O., C.B., ON THE
OPENING OF THE NEW BUILDINGS OF
THE CAMPDEN SCHOOL OF ARTS AND
CRAFTS. OCTOBER 20, MDCCCCIV.

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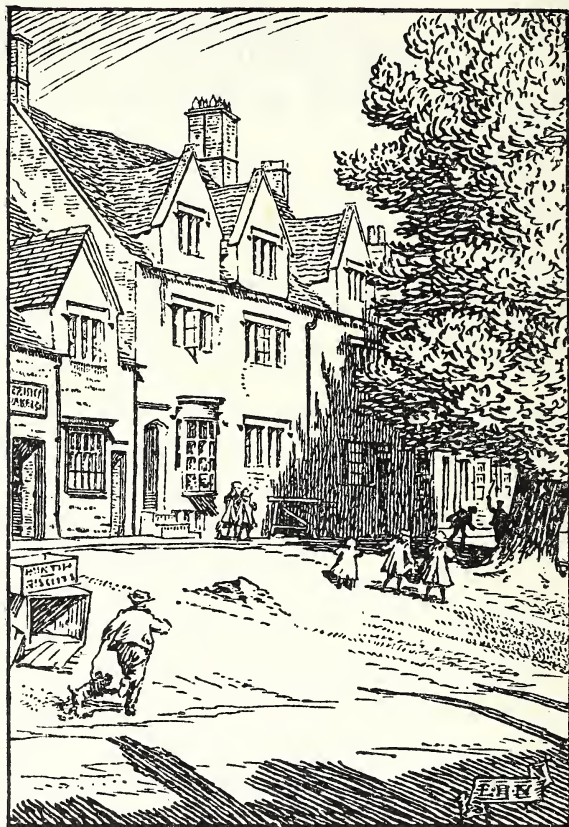




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THE ELM TREE HOUSE BUILDINGS



SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN
THE HIGH STREET, NOW THE
CAMPDEN SCHOOL OF
ARTS & CRAFTS.

MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,—

 AM not sure that I owe a very deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Ashbee for placing me in the position in which I find myself to-day ; in fact, a man who comes to talk to artists about art, and to craftsmen about their craft, is rather in a trap—he is in a very difficult position. However, with age comes that wariness which prevents us from easily falling into such traps as these. You may rest assured that I shall not talk to you about your blow-pipes, your crucibles, your printing presses, your bookbinders' tools, your enamelling processes. I shall continue to look at them from a distance with respect & awe. I must try and find some point upon which we stand upon more level ground together ; and so I shall take for my subject to-day "The Divine Doctrine of Discontent"—not that vulgar form of discontent which snarls and growls at fortune because some neighbour is more prosperous, more lucky, as it is called, than ourselves ; but that high form of discontent which prevents a man when he has executed a piece of work from looking at it and seeing that it is good. That is only possible for the omnipotent Divine Creator. Man, with his limitations and his imperfections, should look at his work and see that it might be better. I do not myself believe that there ever was any first-rate piece of work done in this world in the frame of mind which is known as content. In literature, in art, in science, discontent


is that which has ever been leading men on to higher things, and enabling them to achieve something nearer to that ideal for which they are striving. We know how amongst writers, for instance, old Horace told us the secret of his work was that he was always turning his pen ; we know how Charles Dickens was the terror of compositors, so crossed and re-crossed and scratched were the manuscripts which he handed in to them. It is impossible to conceive that the great works, the masterpieces of the Greek writers, were produced in any other way than by continual erasion and correction. The story of Demosthenes, the poor stammerer, outroaring the scolding of the sea, until he became the greatest orator of his own or any other age, if a fable, is yet a useful one.

But it is no use dwelling too much upon this one point. It is a matter which I fancy everyone will concede. But I should like to remind you of one anecdote which I have used once before, but not here; & at any rate it is a story which has had so much influence upon me that I always feel as if it could scarcely be too often told.

In one of those charming essays on Italy by my old friend Mr. Storey, the American sculptor, there is a tale told how one of the Cardinals was driving into Rome from the Coliseo on a bitter February morning. The wind was blowing, and snow was falling ; it was a regular blizzard. The Cardinal curled himself up in the corner of his coach, and

pitied the wayfarer who must be outside. All of a sudden, as he came nearer to Rome, he saw a pathetic figure struggling against the storm, his cloak closed tightly round him, a staff in his hand—a resolute, sturdy old fellow doing battle with the elements. To his surprise, as he drew near he perceived that he was Michael Angelo—Michael Angelo, the poet, sculptor, painter, engineer, architect, the Wonder of his age. The Cardinal stopped his coach. He said, “Michael Angelo, what are you doing here?” “Eminence,” replied the old man, “I was going out to the ancients to learn something.” Here was this marvel of science and art, still learning, still eager to acquire, still animated by the Divine Spirit of Discontent.

But I wish to show you how this spirit has affected the soul of a whole people, & what a part it is playing in the history of our times. At the present moment we have before us an example of the gayest, the brightest, the sunniest nation in the whole world—I was going to say the most contented nation in the whole world—the Japanese; and yet there is no nation in the world that has given such evidence of being animated by the Divine Spirit of Discontent as they have done. Take their art. For the most part, when a European artist has reproduced some object of Nature, in metal work, in ivory, or in any other material, he is satisfied and contented if the result of his labour shows a presentment of the form which he is striving to copy, in so far as it is seen.

That is not sufficient for the Japanese. The Japanese will produce a bird, & he knows that that bird will have to stand upon two clamps fixed to a stand ; he knows that only the upper part of the feet will be seen, but it will not suffice him that only the upper part of the feet should be worked. The lower part of the feet will be worked with the same assiduity, the same care, the same loving, caressing hand as all the rest of the work which will come before men's eyes. It does not matter to him that the thing shall not be seen ; it would be imperfect if it were seen, therefore the work must be done. Now that is to my mind the highest form of conscientious love of art.  But it is not only in art that this wonderful nation has given some an example of what can be achieved by patient perseverance, and conscientious striving after a high ideal.

Thirty-eight years ago I was in Japan ; and the Japanese then bought from an American firm of the name of Walsh, Hall, & Company their first man-of-war. They had owned a small ironclad which had been presented to them by the United States, but this was their first purchase of a man-of-war. It was an old monitor that had done service in the American War. When the Japanese came to pay over the dollars and take possession of the ship, Messrs. Walsh, Hall, & Company offered them to send their engineer on board and show them how to work the engines. They were grateful for the offer, but they declined it. They said that they knew

all about engines, and that they did not need any help whatever. They took over the ship, and got up steam, and sailed away gaily into the Bay of Yedo; but having got up steam, they did not know how to shut it off again. They had to go round and round in a circle until the fires went out and the boilers cooled. Within thirty-eight years of that time that nation has become one of the first naval powers of the world. Is not that an astonishing instance of what can be achieved by people who set before themselves an ideal, and striving to reach it, are never contented until they have done so? Suddenly they emerged from the gloom of the 13th century to the brilliant light of the 19th. Yet were they not content to don the 19th century ready made from any country as a man might buy a coat at a cheap tailor's. No! they must cull the best wherever it might be found, and so mould & fashion and shape it as should best serve their ends. Professors were brought from all the headquarters of civilisation and progress. Bands of students were sent out into all lands—and how they worked! Jurisprudence, surgery, medicine, political economy, finance, science, the art of war by sea and by land, railway organisation, and all those numberless branches of knowledge which combine to make a people great, were assimilated and even improved upon, until now the pupils bid fair to become the masters of their masters.

These things were open for all men to see. What

some of us who had known Japan well in the old days of the feudal system, when swashbucklers ruled the roast, did not see, was the fact, of which there is now ample evidence, that hand-in-hand with the material change there had taken place an inner & more subtle transformation, yet more marvellous than the mere adoption of modern inventions. Some of us said and wrote things which had better have been left unsaid and unwritten. I, for one, confess with no little shame that I was utterly wrong.

These splendidly discontented Japanese, then, gave themselves no peace until they had brought themselves into the first rank among the nations. And so it comes to pass that they are to-day pitted single-handed, & with success, against what was regarded as the most formidable power of Northern Europe.

☞ There is another force which counts for much in moulding the Japanese character—the Yamato Damashi—the spirit of old Japan, which makes every Japanese a true patriot. Bound up with this is the much famed Bushido—“the way,” or as one might almost translate it, the “religion” of the warrior. I will give you an instance which occurred during the recent operations against Port Arthur. I suppose all of you have heard of the heroic Commander Hirose, who went out to try and block Port Arthur with one of those ships that the Japanese endeavoured to plant in the passage. He succeeded in leaving the ship there and went back to his boat.

When he got to the boat he missed a midshipman. He went back to try and save the midshipman. He found the midshipman dead on the deck of the ship, and he came back to his boat again. Once more it occurred to him that he had left his sword behind him. No Japanese could leave his sword behind him without being disgraced. So he went back a third time, and that time he was blown to pieces. But that is not the whole point of the story. Amongst his effects was found a letter to his family, saying that it was his intention to go on attempting to block Port Arthur until he either succeeded or died in the attempt. But even if he should succeed, and if he should return alive from his almost hopelessly perilous mission, they must still never expect to see him again, for this reason. He was a sailor and an officer of the Japanese Empire. To his Sovereign and his country all his efforts were due ; every drop of his life's blood was theirs. But he could not forget that as a lad, when he went to Europe to study, it was to St. Petersburg that he was sent, and that it was from the Russians that he learnt all that he had known. Therefore in the event of his succeeding in doing the Russians this great injury, it would be necessary for him, as a man of honour, to go on board the Japanese flagship and perform *harakiri* on the quarter deck, thus discharging his debt. Now is not that the sublimest form which the Divine Spirit of Discontent can take? We in this country are apt to look on *harakiri* as a barbarous

and even theatrical form of suicide. It is nothing of the kind. It is indeed the sublimation of all those ideas of honour which constitute the very essence of chivalry. The first doctrine which is instilled into the mind of the young Japanese is that death is preferable to dishonour, and that no amount of worldly prosperity and no amount of success are worth having unless the honour of the man be as spotless as the steel of his blade. This spirit is carried into all the relations of life, and it is the dominant influence which forms the character of the Japanese.

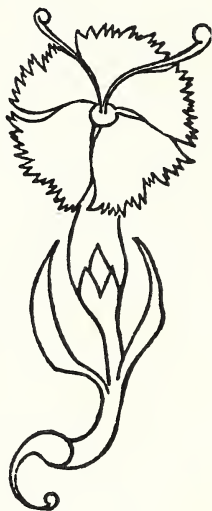
☞ Ladies and Gentlemen, I must apologise to you for having wandered too far afield from the realm of art ; but I think you will see that it is only in appearance that I have done so. I have been desirous of showing you how the most artistic and the most accomplished nation of the day derive their spirit, not only in art and in science, but in moral philosophy, in the duties of the subject to the ruler, and in all the higher relationships of life, from a feeling that it is not sufficient to leave a piece of work alone until you are perfectly certain that it cannot be made better.

We all of us owe great thanks to Mr. Ashbee for having started these schools in this neighbourhood. I think that the schools themselves cannot fail to gain by being nestled in one of the prettiest towns in the Cotswold Hills. I am sure that the neighbourhood will be the better and the happier for the opportunities that are offered to those young men

who have talent & perseverance of effecting something more in life than they could have done under the old system. Again, I think that Mr. Ashbee has been wise in bringing the town to the country. Every movement that tends to lessen the congestion of the great towns is an imperial movement of the greatest importance. And I think we all of us know enough about this institution that Mr. Ashbee has been the means of founding here to be sure that under him and Mrs. Ashbee there exists and flourishes a colony whose happiness and prosperity are their first care in life.

Gentlemen, May the work of your hands prosper; may your schools flourish & bring forth great and noble and far-reaching results; and above all may you yourselves be animated by that Divine Spirit of Discontent upon which I have preached to you to-day. And some day, years hence, when perchance some one of you now full of the hopes, the ambitions, & the lusty vigour of youth, shall have waxed old—when the eye shall have grown dim, and the hand uncertain,—then, and not till then, may such an one looking back upon some dainty piece of work, into which in the long, long ago all his artistic soul, all the poetry of his being had been poured,—be able to murmur gently to himself: Aye! that *was* well done.

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